

THE CHRISTMAS STORY

Luke 2:1-20

The Story of Jesus' Birth

Luke's presentation of Jesus' birth is a rich theological tapestry and shows his skill as a writer bringing together reliable traditions in his infancy narrative. It establishes Jesus as the Messiah, Christ and Lord in the line of David for whom the Jewish people waited.

The vast Roman Empire at this time, spread across the Mediterranean from the Iberian Peninsula (Spain) to Syria and Judea – an area comparable to the area of Australia. Over this empire, peace (Pax Romana) was brought about by suppression and oppression and maintained by military force, and the rule of law and the flow of commerce.

The helpless infant is an image in stark contrast to the powerful Roman ruler, Caesar Augustus. In Luke's Gospel we are shown that the infant Jesus will be the bearer of a different kind of peace. He will restore right relationship and walk with those who are marginalised or alienated, bringing wholeness and salvation.

The sense of God's presence and the joy of the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy (Is 61:1) permeate the narrative. The events described are Good News, especially to those who enjoy "God's favour" – this means for Luke the poor and the lowly.

Although its dating is uncertain, the Roman census is given as the reason for Mary and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem from their home in Nazareth. Obedience to the civic laws places Mary and Joseph in the City of David, Bethlehem, where the birth of the Messiah was expected to occur (Micah 5:1). This reinforces Jesus' connection with the royal Davidic line, already legally established through his foster father, Joseph.

Jesus is born into a hostile environment as there is no place for him to be born except a stable, a cave for animals. He is placed in a manger, the animals' feeding trough. Ironically, this helpless child will become the one who offers hospitality to others, who will give himself as food in the Eucharist. It is interesting to note that Bethlehem means 'city of bread'. Mary wraps Jesus in swaddling clothes, customary for security and to assure good growth but also reminiscent of Wisdom 7:4 where Solomon, son of David is nurtured in swaddling clothes with every care.

Luke 2:11–14 are key verses in this passage. The angels are messengers of Good News. They are not signs of God's presence in themselves, but they point to the real signs: the baby, swaddling clothes, manger. They show the lowly ones that the prophecy of Isaiah (61:1) is being fulfilled and where to look for God's Kingdom in their own time and place.

The shepherds, who are only in the Lucan birth stories, represent the lowest of the low in their society. But they – the poorest – are the first to receive the good news. Thus, we should not dismiss anyone as unworthy. The shepherds respond eagerly and immediately set out to find Jesus. On finding him they tell many others the good news including Mary and Joseph. Mary ponders the meaning of what the shepherds had to say. She too is on a journey of faith. When we read Matthew's account we note it is very different. So we need to remember that the Gospel writers have their own messages to give their communities.

Part 1 (based on Luke 1:30, 38)

YOU WILL NEED:

- Purple cloth
- Mary and angel from the Nativity set
- Bible

Children are seated in a semi-circle ready to listen to the story. When the children are settled, go to the shelf and carry the materials as you would the Bible. Place these beside you.

Place the Bible in front of you with your hand on it.

This story comes from our special book which we call the Bible. It is about a girl who had a most unexpected visitor.

Place the Bible beside you.

Lay the purple cloth in the middle of the space.

Purple is the colour for getting ready. Advent is a time for getting ready. During Advent we are getting ready to celebrate Christmas.

Place Mary on the cloth.

This is Mary.

Place angel on the cloth facing Mary. Place your hand behind the angel as you say:

**God sent an angel called Gabriel to ask Mary to be the mother of Jesus.
Angels are God's special messengers.**

Move the angel Gabriel a little way towards Mary.

The angel Gabriel told Mary not to be afraid, because God was very near to her.

Move Mary to stand beside the angel.

Mary said, "Yes, I will do whatever God wants."

Sit quietly for a moment and then engage with the first three 'I wonders', KWL p152.

Carefully pack story materials into storage box and put on shelf. Ensure that children are watching so they know how to pack the materials away and where to find them.

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Part 2

KWL Chapter 20 (based on Luke 2:7-20)

YOU WILL NEED

- Bible
- beige or pale yellow underlay
- road the same length as the underlay
- Nativity set

Children are seated in a semi-circle ready to listen to the story. When the children are settled, go to the shelf and carry the materials as you would the Bible. Place these beside you.

Place the Bible in front of you with your hand on it.

This story comes from our special book which we call the Bible.

Place the underlay in the middle of the space.

Place the road on top of the underlay.

Place Mary, Joseph and donkey on the road at the far end away from you.

When the time came for Jesus to be born, Mary and Joseph had to go to Bethlehem.

Slowly move Mary, Joseph and donkey halfway down the road.

Place your hand at the opposite end of the road to Mary and Joseph.

Bethlehem was a long way from their home.

Continue to slowly move Mary, Joseph and donkey down the road to Bethlehem.

When they arrived the town was very crowded.

Place stable to the side of the road. Move Mary, Joseph and donkey from the road to the stable.

The only place Mary and Joseph could find to stay was a stable.

Place Jesus in the manger between Mary and Joseph.

In this cold and lonely place Jesus was born.

Place shepherds and sheep on the underlay away from the road and the stable.

Nearby some very poor shepherds were looking after their sheep.

Place an angel near shepherds.

An angel of the Lord appeared to them and told them that Jesus had been born in a stable in Bethlehem.

Place more angels facing shepherds.

That night God's angels sang, "Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth."

Move angels to your side. Move shepherds to the stable.

The shepherds went to the stable to see Jesus. They saw Mary and Joseph and the baby Jesus lying in the manger.

The shepherds were the only other people who came to see Jesus, the Son of God, on the night he was born.

Engage with 'I wonder', KWL p152.

Carefully pack story materials into storage box and put on shelf. Ensure that children are watching so they know how to pack the materials away and where to find them.